

It's going to be okay by YvonneSilver

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Gen, Post-Season/Series 01

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper

Relationships: Eleven & Jim "Chief" Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-11-19

Updated: 2016-11-19

Packaged: 2022-04-02 00:15:10

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,648

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Jim Hopper finds an intruder in his home

It's going to be okay

You'd think it'd be nice to get back to the normal day-to-day stuff of small-town policing. You'd think that after two weeks of weirdness it'd be great to return to the time when the weirdest thing that happened was a group of teenagers painting obscene things on the water reservoirs of the local farmers. You'd think he'd be relieved. Except there was no going back, not really.

Instead, Jim Hopper found himself gravitating back to the places most connected to the weirdness. He visited Joyce, ostensibly to check up on her and Will, but also to check out the house, to see if he could sense any weak spots in their reality, to make sure the monster wasn't coming back.

He drove by the school, even though the black goo had long since been cleaned away, and a new blackboard had been ordered. When it eventually arrived, he helped install it. The cracks in the wall were still visible beneath the thin layer of paint. He ran his fingers over them, but they lead nowhere. There was nothing on the other side.

Most often, he visited the forest. He took long walks in the winter cold, his eyes peeled for anything strange. An oddly shaped tree. A hint of black ooze. A scrap of pink fabric. Nothing showed up. He left food behind anyway, hoping that the little girl might find it if she managed to get back.

All was quiet until about two months later. Hopper returned home late after spending all afternoon chasing a raccoon. It's not technically in the job description, but Caroline had insisted that since the little rascal had broken into her house and run off with one of her shoes, it could be considered a thief, and he should apprehend it. He'd eventually found the shoe, if not the culprit. Caroline hadn't been pleased.

When he drove up to his house, it was already dark out. He saw it as soon as his house came into view - the lights were on. Hopper immediately cut the headlights, and switched off the engine, rolling

to a stop just outside his parking space in hushed darkness. He knew it. He knew something would show up again sooner or later.

He crept towards his home, taking care not to make any noise. He pressed his back against the wall underneath his living room window. By the light spilling out from it, he checked his service weapon. He was surprisingly calm, given that there was a stranger in his house yet again. Maybe he was getting used to it.

Hopper gripped his weapon in both hands, and straightened up for a quick peek into the house, quickly ducking out of sight again. He hadn't seen any people, but he saw the mess they'd made. There were half-open packaging strewn around his floor. He heard scratching coming from the direction of the kitchen, the sound of drawers opening, something rummaging through his cupboards. For an odd moment, he thought the raccoon might've followed him home.

He shook his head. Not raccoons. People. People from the Institute again? They were supposed to have cleared out, but then again, they weren't supposed to have been operating in the first place. Either way, he wasn't about to let anyone invade his home again.

He almost made the biggest mistake of his life that night. He was anxious and jumpy, the effects of a fortnight of weirdness still fresh in his mind even two months later. The living room was torn apart, but appeared to be empty, only adding to his apprehension. He made his way into the house, his weapon drawn and prepared to fire. It was only the years of training and his excellent reflexes that stopped him from immediately pulling the trigger when something moved in the corner of his eye. There, perched precariously on his kitchen counter, was the girl who - he'd been told - had disappeared into a black stain on a school wall.

"Eleven," he whispered in shocked disbelief.

She startled, looked up at him with big eyes, like a deer in headlights. She was still wearing the borrowed pink dress, and the blue shirt he'd loaned her when she came out of the kiddie pool, soaking wet and shivering and whispering about a lost little boy and the monster that

hunted him. The content of most of his kitchen cabinets (mostly canned soup) was spread out on the counter and the floor. She was holding a packet of instant noodles. Hopper quickly put two and two together.

“You lookin’ for something to eat?”

She said nothing, merely stared at him, prepared to bolt at the slightest sign of trouble.

He put his weapon on safety and tucked the gun away, making sure to keep his movements slow and deliberate. Her eyes followed his hands, but she didn’t relax when the gun was out of sight. He slowly raised his hands and shuffled towards the fridge, keeping his eye on Eleven. He projected what he hoped was reassurance, but he wasn’t sure how successful he was. He knew a guy his size could be intimidating even at the best of times.

He found the fridge handle on the touch. Eleven started at the sound of the door opening, but she didn’t run. Hopper was loathe to take his eyes off her, afraid she might disappear again if he looked away, but he made himself turn and look inside the fridge.

There was hardly anything edible in there. He could hardly give an underfed little girl ramen and beer. He really should improve his eating habits. He wished he hadn’t left the last of his Eggos in the forest cache. Then again, maybe she found that stash? He cast another glance at Eleven. She hadn’t moved at all, except to turn her head to watch him. She looked hollowed out, like a puppet of a girl instead of a real one. Hopper silently cursed the Institute’s scientists. He turned his attention back to the fridge.

Finally he settled on cooking her some rice with ketchup. He found a can of peaches among the soup cans on the floor that must’ve slipped in there by accident - Hopper did not have a sweet tooth. Luckily Eleven did, and after the initial distrust, she emptied the whole can before the rice was done cooking. Hopper handed her a paper towel

to wipe away the syrup on her chin, and was glad to see she didn't shy away from him this time.

Eleven didn't take to the rice as easily, but under Hopper's coaxing she ate a couple of mouthfuls, sitting right there on the kitchen counter. Hopper leant against the opposite counter and watched her eat. Somehow, that simple act made her seem more real to him. He couldn't be hallucinating her. She was eating his rice and making a face.

When she'd finished a little over half of the bowl, she seemed to have had enough. Hopper picked up on her hesitation, and smiled gently.

"Not hungry anymore? That's okay, I'll finish the rest later."

Eleven looked up at him with a look of apprehension, then carefully set the bowl aside. She sat up and put her hands in her lap.

He mirrored her posture, clasping his hands between his thighs. "So. What now?" He asked her as much as himself. He'd just been doing what seemed like the next logical thing to do, without thinking too far ahead.

Eleven shrugged.

"Not much of a talker, are we? That's okay, I'm not usually much of a talker either. How about a shower?" Things were always better after a warm shower.

Eleven looked down at herself, and Hopper couldn't help but grin.

"Yeah, you're a bit of a mess at the moment. Mind you, I'm not one to talk." He had been digging through trash for most of the afternoon. He probably didn't smell much better than she did. "It's nothing a spot of soap and water won't fix. Come on." He held out his hand.

Without hesitating, Eleven dropped down off the counter and slid her hand into his. Hopper swallowed heavily around the lump in his throat when he felt how small her hand was in his. "Okay," he said, and coughed to normalize his voice. "Bathroom is this way."

Hopper went around the room tidying up a little while Eleven showered. He heard the water stop running way too soon after it had started. He tried not to think about the reason why she might dislike water. Eleven came out of the bathroom not long after, her cheeks flushed and a smile on her face. It was good to see her smiling.

She was wearing one of Hopper's shirts, a red-checkered one, which was of course much too large for her. He'd have to find her some clothes tomorrow. At least he'd make sure to wash her dress tonight, so it'd be dry in the morning.

"Okay, bedtime now." He stooped down to pick her up, an old habit he'd had with Sarah. When she didn't come into his arms, but instead folded in on herself and shied away, he was confused at first. But this wasn't his daughter, he reminded himself. He couldn't expect to be able to treat her as such. He settled clumsily on one knee, trying and failing to make the movement seem natural. "I, uh, I made the bed for you." He gestured towards the open door.

Eleven looked from him to the door and back. "Okay." It was the first word she'd said.

Taken aback, Hopper watched her cross the room. She turned around on the threshold of the room, hesitating.

"You can leave the door open if you want. I'll be right here when you wake up."

"Promise?"

He nodded, taking the question as seriously as she had posed it.

"Okay."

Author's Note:

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